

CATS Enhancements

Teacher concerns addressed in nine areas

Collaboration. Collegiality. Continuous improvement.

These qualities have characterized the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) from the start. When the time came to work on a new testing contract, the Kentucky Board of Education had an opportunity to further enhance Kentucky's internationally pre-eminent system of assessment and accountability.

Naturally, we turned again to our key stakeholders for help. And, especially, we turned to you — our public school educators. We knew you had ideas for improvement. We asked you what they were and how to make them happen.

Every public school educator in Kentucky has had an opportunity

to help enhance the Core Content for Assessment, the writing portfolio, the way the tests are designed — even the way they are administered. Literally thousands of Kentucky teachers and administrators have taken part in this process. We've had thoughtful legislative guidance and lots of help from a panel of the nation's top testing experts.

We have come so far in Kentucky. Every measure of educational attainment shows it.

And now, thanks to you, these new CATS enhancements, which take effect in spring 2007, will improve teaching and learning even more and take us to the next level.

A Clearer, More Focused Core Content

You'll know what's important — and what's *really* important.

The Kentucky Board of Education directed the state Department of Education to refine these key statements of what students should know and be able to do — to make our core content more focused, with clearer priorities and content specified by grade levels. No guesswork!

The Core Content for Assessment is now better aligned with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), national content standards and the American Diploma Project.

A Way to Promote Student Accountability

and new, student-level instructional information.

As a measure for school accountability, CATS is the best in the biz. No other state, no other test, no other system measures school improvement better. Just ask Education Week — the national publication examines every state with a microscope, and it's given us an A grade every year for the past three years.

But, in addition to school accountability, we need student accountability. How many times have you heard that? Well, the Kentucky Board of Education and the Department of Education have heard it, too. And so the new test design will include common items taken by all students that can provide new, student-level instructional information and also could be used to promote low-stakes student accountability at the school or district level.

In the future, CATS won't just measure school performance. It will help teachers know each individual student better by providing new and useful feedback reports at the classroom and school level that can be used for diagnostic purposes. And local districts will be able to use results to measure student performance as they see fit. The test will be good not only for meeting our annual accountability requirements but also for improving daily instruction.

A Way to Hold the Line on Testing Time

with a premium on higher-order thinking skills.

With any comprehensive test, it's critical to include both multiple-choice and open-response items. In reviewing CATS, the board believes it's important to spend the minimum amount of testing time required to make sure the test remains valid and reliable.

That's why we'll use slightly more multiple-choice items designed to measure more than basic skills.

The Right Balance with Open Response

and a greater weight given to multiple-choice items.

As the number of open-response questions decreases and the number of multiple-choice questions increases, the board will adjust how these questions are weighted in the scoring to reflect that change.

What will the new balance be? The goal is to give approximately equal weight to both the open-response and the multiple-choice portions of the test. Remember, many of the multiple-choice items will have a higher level of difficulty to keep the emphasis on higher-order thinking.

A Measure to Help Forecast College Success

and a way to guide specialized student work.

Another longtime item on the CATS wish list is a predictive measure of college success. Are our students on track for success in college? If not, what courses should they take to help them get on track? What areas should be accelerated or focused on specialized work?

Assessments aimed at measuring likely success in college can help not only students but also teachers, parents and schools make sure that students are well prepared for success in college.

More Choice in Writing Prompts

and a focus on analytical writing in high school.

There will be no increase in testing time allotted to on-demand writing, but enough items to make sure the test remains valid and reliable. Students will complete one on-demand writing prompt and some multiple-choice items at fifth and eighth grades. At the 12th grade, students will complete two 60-minute on-demand writing prompts with one focusing on analysis and response to text. Students at all levels will have a choice of prompts.

A Way to Follow Each Student's Progress

and track individual growth in reading and math.

Because of its very thoroughness and versatility — and because it's intended to measure schools, not students — CATS traditionally has lacked in one key area of educational assessment: longitudinal measurements across the entire career of a student. In order to measure student progress over the many years of a student's career in reading and math, students in grades 3-8 will take yearly assessments in these two content areas beginning in spring 2007.

The outcomes of these yearly assessments will be fantastic for math and reading teachers to tweak their instruction across, say, a middle or high school curriculum, ensuring that all students get the comprehensive learning they deserve.

A Creative Approach to Arts & Humanities, PL/VS

with pilots to assess what kids know and can do.

The state board understands the value of Arts & Humanities and Practical Living/Vocational Studies in the lives of our children and will maintain the current weight of these assessments in the overall accountability system. However, the board wants to know if there's a better way to test these content areas to address what students do as well as what they know.

Ideally, revisiting these assessments also will provide some time relief to schools and students in the bargain. Kentucky will maintain the current system as a transition while pilots are being evaluated.

Help for Doing the Writing Portfolio Right

with fewer entries and guidelines for administration.

The new writing portfolio will have fewer student entries, a change from holistic to analytical scoring to provide more specific feedback to students and teachers, and alignment at the high school level with the expectations of higher education. The Department of Education will provide more specific professional development for teachers and new regulations and guidelines designed to reduce inappropriate portfolio practices.